

BolivianExpress

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Magazine



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PRIDE

By Xenia Elsaesser

A CULTURE VULTURE MAGAZINE?

Bolivian Express: a culture vulture magazine? Sure, we do have a penchant for the arts. But the arts are also part of a wider industry: the exportable produce or wares of a country. The goods Bolivia produces, as compared to those it imports, are indicators of its stage of economic well-being and development. So how is Bolivian production faring, is Bolivia working hard? To start with, let's look at some background statistics.

Bolivia has been through some tough times. The aftermath of the 1980s crisis left the country among the poorest nations of Latin America, and when people speak of the Bolivian economy it is this predicament that is highlighted. Poverty is staggering: the latest data from the World Bank has 60% of the population at the national poverty line, and unlike its South American neighbours, Peru; Argentina; Chile and Brazil, who rank within the top hundred nations for GDP (IMF 2009), Bolivia remains at position 127. That's one place above the Sudan.

However, despite these crippling features, there are many reasons to be positive about the state of Bolivian industry and economy. In 2009, UNESCO declared Bolivia free of illiteracy, which is sure to have a healthy impact on the future productivity of the country. But most astounding are Bolivia's recent growth and employment indicators. External debt is going down, private trade going up. Best of all: unemployment in Bolivia was at 5.2% in 2007. It beats both the USA and the UK. Bolivians may be poor, but they are working pretty damn hard. So, what are they getting up to in their working hours?

It would be easy to talk about agriculture and natural gas, the big winners for the Bolivian economy. But we hear enough about them. This month, we speak not of the industry of Bolivia, but of industrious Bolivia: a nation of enterprising and resourceful hard-workers. Thus we seek out an eclectic collection of local products and their dynamic creators, examining a range of companies and artifacts that range from the commercial to artistic, bacchanalian and coca-flavoured. Just like Bolivian Express, all our special features this month are sealed with a proud stamp: made in Bolivia.



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TRUE BOLIVIANITE:

The Story of Ametrine

Text and Photo By Matthew Grace



Ametrine, a purple-and-yellow blend of amethyst and citrine semiprecious gems, is known as bolivianite inside of Bolivia. For years, it was thought to be available from various mines in the eastern Bolivia and parts of Brazil. Rumor even had it that gemologists had perfected a method of synthesizing ametrine in a laboratory. But these speculations obscured the truth, namely that the Bolivian military had been illegally extracting the gem from a single mine in the deep wilderness near the Brazilian border. The stones were smuggled into Brazil and cut, polished, and sold, their provenance obfuscated to circumvent Brazilian import duties and hide the Bolivian military's plundering of Bolivia's natural resources. Then, in late 1989, Bolivian law changed and the government granted a concession to the Santa Cruz-based Metales y Metales del Oriente (M&M) company to legally mine the gems. Founded by Ramiro Rivero, a businessman from La Paz, M&M now has exclusive rights to the Anahí mine near the border of Brazil in the vast Pantanal, one the world's largest wetlands.

A quirky product of molten metal

and water, combined with thousands of years of heat and radiation exposure, these gems have been sitting underground for millennia. According to legend, about 400 years ago the local Ayoreos tribe gave the mine as a dowry to a passing conquistador who married the tribal chief's daughter. Her name was Anahí. But the conquistador was more interested in finding El Dorado, and, depending on whom you ask, he either left the mine untouched or was driven away by the Ayoreos. We do not know what happened to the mine's namesake, the Indian princess Anahí, although some versions of the story say she was killed to prevent her from leaving with the conquistador.

M&M's processing facilities sit in a large industrial park outside of central Santa Cruz. Inside, dozens of workers busy themselves in front of workstations, first measuring and grading rough clusters of the gem, then grinding them down into gemstones and separating them into colour piles. Skilled gem cutters then cut and polish the stones under magnifying glasses into trapezoid, emerald, and baguette shapes before they're

shipped off to retail locations. Rivero, a short but sharply dressed man in his early 60s, has his office just off of M&M's work floor. In it, various gems are displayed conspicuously: rough amethyst gemstone clusters weighing tens of kilograms are arranged on the floor, while his desk is covered with a scattering of cut gems—purple amethyst, yellow citrine, and the coveted ametrine.

When M&M was granted the mining concession in 1989, Rivero explains, the market was flooded with cheap ametrine, much of it poorly cut. Rivero decided to change how the stone was provided. "We like to produce the least amount possible," he says, "and give as much added value as possible, with the idea of producing quality." To that end, M&M created its combined offices and production facilities in Santa Cruz. It's the exclusive distributor of naturally produced commercial ametrine in the world—and the source of much amethyst. (Ametrine can occasionally be found in other locations in Brazil, but Anahí is acknowledged as the only commercially viable operation worldwide.) With no longer any need to fudge the provenance of the stones, and



since M&M has a virtual monopoly on ametrine production, local markets near the Brazilian-Bolivian border dwindled and eventually were shuttered.

In order to boost ametrine's value and reputation—which suffered during its illegal-mining days due to rumors that its synthetic version was basically indistinguishable from its naturally occurring form—M&M regularly hosts gemologists and geochemists, who have confirmed that the synthetics lack a certain quality that's inherent in the naturally produced variety. “When you talk about quality gems,” Rivero says, “there are two issues: depth of color and brilliance. The Russians [who synthesized ametrine] obtained great depth in purple and yellow. What they don't have is the brilliance, which nature gives the stones. It's a plastic appearance. I wouldn't even call it jewelry.”

To reach the Anahí mine, one must trace the gems' voyage in reverse, up the Paraguay River from Puerto Quijarro, a small, dusty town in the extreme east of Bolivia, through the vastness of the Bolivian and Brazilian Pantanal to the far-flung Mandiolé Lagoon. Vast tracks of water lilies clog the slow-moving river while urubus—

there because they already have a mastery—and lack of fear—of the mining profession.

The mine's entrance is located up a steep slope from the camp, at the end of a path that is littered with cast-off low-grade gems from below-ground. Purple stones crunch under feet in the dense brush; quartz and citrine stones are mixed in, forming a colorful semi-precious path to the mine. Large clusters of amethyst are strewn about as the earth offers up a bounty of purple treasure. The mine's entrance is a horizontal shaft set in a crumbling rock wall. Stuffy air greets visitors, and bats flitter about deep in the hole. “They live here,” Gonzales explains. He tells his guests to don hardhats and gloves before going any further. “Watch your step. It gets very slippery in here.”

The Anahí mine extends 80 meters underground. It isn't particularly deep, since the gem lode is near the surface. This is fortunate, Gonzalo explains, because the region receives so much rain that the lower levels of the mine are frequently flooded and inaccessible. Gonzalo shines his flashlight down into a vertical shaft. “This goes all the way to the bottom,” he says. “But as you can see, it's flooded

ladder, a seemingly endless climb in the pitch dark. With every meter farther down, the temperature increases; water drips down and mud scrapes off boots, making the ladder dangerously slick. Gradually, though, the light from Gonzalo's torch gains brightness, until he's visible in a low and narrow tunnel. He shines his lamp into a refrigerator-sized vault cut into the side of the shaft, and a deep purple hue reflects back out. Hundreds of fist-sized gem-quality stone clusters project from the vault wall. Deep and light purple and yellow gems glisten in the darkness.

Miners pry the large stones out of the various vaults in which the stones are found. The tunnels in the side of the hill follow the lode of gems; miners must dig exploratory shafts to find where the gems extend, then widen the holes and reinforce them with timber so that they can prise one cluster at a time from the clutches of the earth. They then carry the clusters outside and place them in metal carts, which are wheeled to the facilities back at the camp. There, a young man washes and grades the rough gems in an outdoor workshop. The first of many gem graders, he dumps a cart of gems onto a wire mesh platform, sprays them down with a

TO REACH THE ANAHÍ MINE, ONE MUST TRACE THE GEMS' VOYAGE IN REVERSE, UP THE PARAGUAY RIVER FROM PUERTO QUIJARRO, A SMALL, DUSTY TOWN IN THE EXTREME EAST OF BOLIVIA

black vultures with light-colored head plumes—soar overhead. Crocodiles snap their jaws at boats speeding by. Mennonite soybean farms, cut out of the dense vegetation, come into view and then disappear around the river's innumerable horseshoe bends. From Mandiolé Lagoon, it's a two-and-a-half-hour ride through an insect-filled forest up a narrow, muddy road. Once guests finally arrive at the mining camp, M&M's junior engineer, Gonzalo Gonzales, shows guests the spartan accommodations. Miners relax in the dining hall; many of them are from Potosí, where the mining vocation goes back generations. M&M frequently hires workers from

with water.” Nearby, a wooden scaffold is decorated with ribbons and surrounded by cigarettes, coca leaves, and bottles of alcohol. It's an offering to El Tío, or “the Uncle,” who is the spirit of the mine. Miners in Bolivia traditionally leave offerings to El Tío, to appease him so that he doesn't claim many lives.

About 100 meters into the mine, a wooden ladder extends into a dark hole in the floor. Gonzalo becomes animated and explains that a gem vault sits only 20 meters below. After giving instructions to his guests to follow, Gonzalo climbs down. The guests follow him down the muddy

high-pressure hose, and quickly separates the good from the bad. Then, with a well-practiced technique, he gathers the good gems in a chute and dumps them into a bag. The bag joins dozens more just like it, to be eventually shipped down the river to Puerto Quijarro and then the M&M production facilities in Santa Cruz. There they'll be cut and polished; then, in weeks or months, they'll be in showrooms, in Santa Cruz or Brazil, possibly China, India, or the United States, a two-tone purple-and-yellow treasure snatched from the depths of the Bolivian wetlands, a product of nature, myth, and back-breaking labor.



Robbie Macdonald says:

So you have your product. It's going to be the next big thing for sure, but how do you get people to buy it? Welcome to the world of marketing. It may be something you associate with New York or Buenos Aires. If this is the case you may be surprised to find a thriving marketing industry here in La Paz.

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Bolivian Express likes this

Like any city, when walking the streets of La Paz advertisements, branding and promotions can be seen everywhere. Flawless models flaunting the latest piece of technology beam enthusiastically from their billboards placed across highways and tower blocks and every shop window eagerly invites you to 'find them on facebook'. If there is a medium which can communicate information, then you can guarantee at some point that information will be telling you to buy something.

I wanted to investigate this world of marketing first hand. How does it operate? What's the secret to vast exposure? How do you relate to a target audience? My first port of call took me to the company 'Toolbox Communications'. If you have a business and want to get it off the ground this is where to start. They specialize in getting you recognised, in every and any way they can.

They work in every media you can think of. Cae Pelenque, the young director explains that there are two kinds of media, the more formal methods of television, press and radio, and the more original methods, such as social networking, viral advertising and most importantly, interaction with people. Toolbox's first port of call may be the more traditional methods, but Cae explains that Toolbox takes a 360 degree approach to working with brands. No stone is left unturned when searching for the right way to promote a company. He stressed that this was his favorite type of promotion is actually talking to people and getting them involved personally. The better experience they can give someone the more they will remember it and associate it with the

product or brand they are promoting. He gives one example where they staged a fake protest in the street for Beldent chewing gum. The joke was that people were protesting that the flavor was too intense and lasted too long. Onlookers watched upon this eccentric skit with confusion and humour. One thing was for sure, come the evening Beldent chewing gum was the topic of conversation.

Now Toolbox has forged alliances with companies in Argentina, giving them a truly international reputation. The progress of their expansion is staggering, having achieved all this in only a few years. Cae's enthusiasm for marketing was infectious. Listening to him talk so passionately really inspired me. It was certain Toolbox was going in all the right directions. If half of Bolivia's communications companies work as hard as Toolbox, then the competition is as healthy and cutting edge as any other country in the world.

My investigation into forms of Bolivian marketing next took me to a more hands-on experience: casting for the production of Bolivian television advert. The reason was to meet Jose Arispe, directing assistant to home grown talent Juan Carlos Valdivia who was shooting the advert. With Juan Carlos' directing pedigree (he directed the awarding winning movies 'Zona Sur' and 'American Visa'), I was keen to find out more about the television advertising industry in La Paz. Jose graduated from film school one year ago; he notes that it is common for directors to make the transition from feature film to advertising. Jose mentions that Juan Carlos always takes the same approach to filming an advertisement as he does

with a feature film. Juan Carlos' style can be seen in both his films and his adverts, with the result being that his adverts can relate to a target market in the same way the director of a film wants to relate with his audience. It is quite obvious when viewing some of Juan Carlos' previous advertisements. They have a strong narrative and distinct story to them.

Jose tells me that before Juan Carlos there wasn't much of an industry in Bolivia. When he won awards for his work some of the bigger companies started taking notice of Bolivia instead of awarding contracts to production companies in Chile and Argentina. The amount of work fluctuates depending on the season, but over a longer period of time it has steadily been growing. Now the business is positively thriving, with several Bolivian production companies competing for contracts. Big events such as the current Copa America football tournament also drive the opportunity of production forward. Jose reminisces of the time when Bolivia qualified for the world cup back in 1994. He says nearly every player starred in a separate advertisement!

It was really refreshing to see such modern and progressive companies like Toolbox doing so well. Equally it was satisfying to know that now more the ever, the majority of television advertisements seen on Bolivian channels come from home grown talent. Marketing in La Paz alone is thriving, and this cosmopolitan city is brimming with creativity and enthusiasm. When thinking of where to go to find a fresh new approach to marketing, Bolivia is certainly up there with the other big hitters of the continent.

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PROJECT DURAZNO

TEXT BY XENIA ELSAESSER

Independent cinema has a hard time of it in the richest of countries, and in Bolivia it is no easier. Filmmakers must campaign for funds to finance their projects and expect little profit: here the difficulty is not the will, but the means to produce an independent film. Nevertheless, the hard work and many hands that are muscled into production transform this area into a hive of cultural productivity, and Yashira Jordan's new documentary, *Durazno* (Peach) is doing much to bring independent cinema into the mass arena. But no integrity is lost: *Durazno*, rather than being produced en masse, is being brought to life by the masses, thus marking an important moment in the history of Bolivian cinema.

Project *Durazno* is innovative in three ways: it is ecologically produced, it is "transmedia"

and it is partially 'crowdfunded', a technique that has never been used before in Bolivia. For this reason it has also not been an easy ride: one of the most difficult tasks for director Jordan has been to communicate and explain the concept to her target audience. So what exactly do these terms mean?

Crowd-funding

Crowdfunding means allowing members of the public to become producers of the film. This is facilitated through the web-page that takes online donations. *Durazno* thereby expands both its publicity and funding capacity by appealing to private individuals. One of the main barriers Jordan has come up against is that Crowd-funding has never been used before in Bolivia, so people often think they are being asked to donate to charity. This, she argues, is not the case: they are being asked to become involved in the production of the film itself. Funders' names appear in the credits, and they receive early sneak previews and teasers of what the film involves both before and during the production. This allows them to watch the project develop from just the seed of an idea into its fully-fledged fruit. They are producers not only through donating money, but because their supportive presence means that they too are emotionally involved in the project, and have high hopes for its success. Depending on the size of their contribution

they are offered relative incentives, ranging from a free edition of the DVD to a VIP ticket to the premiere and private email updates on the project's progress.

Ecological film production

Jordan's naming of her own production company, *Arbol cine*, (Tree cinema) is reflective of her own values. For her it represents 'cine orgánico', something that grows naturally, and with consideration for its natural environment. It would be an exaggeration to call *Durazno* an entirely ecologically produced project: just like any other film it needs cameras, lighting, cables draining electricity by the kilowatt. Nevertheless as far as it can, it is doing its bit both directly for the environment and for awareness. There are a number of 'dream-scenes' in the documentary, where memories of the protagonist are re-enacted in a fragile and ephemeral landscape. This landscape, Jordan proposes, will be constructed from recycled goods: cardboard, plastic and glass bottles. In obtaining these materials the 'crowd-funding' and 'ecological production' concepts become linked: members of the public are also asked to contribute their rubbish. Tagline: "lleva tu basura y convertíla en película....." (Bring your rubbish and transform it into a film!) Jordan has organised various *Durazno* 'picnics', meeting points in open spaces to which the public can bring their rubbish.



If there is too much Jordan in turn donates it to environmental organisations, who can sell it on to profit-making corporations for profit. Durazno thereby supports other organisations involved in environmental protection.

"Transmedia"

It sounds a bit space age, but Durazno's third innovative characteristic is truly trendy. Current technologies like surround-sound and 3-D aim to make the viewer feel enveloped by the film; it leaps out from the screen in more than a metaphorical sense. But "Transmedia" goes further, taking this experience beyond the cinema doors. Crowdfunding and the environmental awareness are part of this effort: for this film's target audience the cinematic experience has become an active one that plays out in diverse spaces. It transcends its original medium, the screen, to take place over the internet, at picnics, and through donating rubbish. In turn, the events organised by Jordan create a Project Durazno dialogue in which the crowd gives to the film and the film speaks back at them. She has even coordinated 'flashmobs' (a crowd whose conversion in a public space is organised over the internet), in which everyone called to the occasion had been instructed to suddenly begin eating peaches. It's publicity, it's funding, it's peaches all around, it's "transmedia".

So what's the film all about? Durazno is a documentary about an individual's search for his identity. It is co-produced with Argentina, and tracks an Argentinean subject in search of his long-lost parentage. When asked about the significance of the film's title, Jordan remains cryptic. She can't give it all away, however, let's just say it is central to the film's visual and metaphorical aesthetic. This closing comment epitomises what this new type of cinema production is all about: while Jordan emphasises the audience's involvement in the film, in fact it is the partial nature of



our participation that is seductive. In contributing to Durazno we don't really become producers, we're not signing up for months of hard slog, worries and late nights. We also don't get to make any executive decisions. Instead we become "life producers": we're buying our ticket to a world of pre-release entertainment: picnics, activities, flashmobs and teasers, carefully orchestrated by Jordan. Thereby Jordan expands the significance of independent cinema in the lives of her audience, and hopes that through her funding-cum-publicity activities, this audience will expand. Worldwide in recent years, Crowdfunding has become a burgeoning phenomenon: in an art world plagued by

recession cuts and dropping sales due to piracy and online availability, it is a way to keep independent cinema alive. The message to the public is direct: if you don't pay for it, it won't get made. Through joining this international trend, Bolivian independent cinema can become more visible and relevant to a mass audience, attract more funding, and one day perhaps make it to an international stage. Meanwhile Jordan is working hard to whet our appetites and bring us to her own cinema door, dribbling with anticipation for Bolivia's new giant peach. To watch the teaser and contribute for your piece of peach go to: <http://www.indiegogo.com/durazno>



Fashion

At Altitude
Text By Maeva Gonzalez

My fashion journey took me from the heights of El Alto in La Paz to the lively and hot city of Santa Cruz. Bolivia has many resources in alpaca and leather that make designs of great quality and seduce an increasing crowd in the country and abroad. Alpaca, a Bolivian national treasure, is famous for being lightweight but warm. Alpaca clothes are available all over the world, and it all originates on the backs of the sturdy little animals here in the Andes. To Bolivia and neighbouring Andean nations, Alpaca is as precious as gold, in particular for one of the most famous Bolivian designers, Beatriz Canedo Patiño, who created her fashion house in 1987. Beatriz was born and raised in Bolivia and studied in America, later living in Paris for a while. Her designs for men and women are famous among Bolivian people: the last time I went to a friend's party, almost two thirds of the guests had coats or accessories from her. Beatriz is a leader in the Bolivian fashion scene, and through prioritising a Bolivian natural resource in her use of alpaca, she creates clothes that are truly Bolivian.

Similarly, Liliana Castellanos has been a key figure in fomenting an interest in fashion in the country. From Tarija, Liliana studied Fashion Design and Haute Couture in Buenos Aires then worked for the French fashion house Nina Ricci. She makes luxury alpaca clothes and is recognized as one of the most established Bolivian designers.

On the other hand, many aspiring designers here believe in home-grown Bolivian fashion. Many of them are happy to talk about their career and share their views on the fashion industry. Mariana Carranza is a passionate 29-year-old designer who in October of last year, brought the brand Narcisa to life. The Narcisa style is essentially urban fashion but flavoured with a strong sense of personal identity.. Mariana has a shop in La Paz but is about to open her newest boutique in Santa Cruz in mid-August. The style is in the details: shoulder patches made with studs, stars applied on the collar, and often some hearts. Mariana's primary inspiration is photography, for which the attention to detail is indeed crucial. The work she has done so far

to make her business a success has been tiring but rewarding. Narcisa is a brand that links fashion, art, poetry and photography all together. The clients are all from completely different backgrounds: from 16-year-old teenagers to the 50-year-old women. Mariana explains that Narcisa touches diverse people that want to play with clothes and fashion.

When describing the reasons for her brand's success, Mariana insists on the importance of the role of Facebook: the 'likes' and 'tags' of the fans helped Narcisa spread to more people. The brand is not impersonal, it relates to the clients and that is why they feel attached to it. Whereas Europeans have grown up with famous fashion designers whose name defines their brand (Think Alexander McQueen or Karl Lagerfeld), a clothes line with an identity spearheaded by a fashion personality is entirely new to Bolivia, and the way is being led by designers like Mariana and Liliana.

Indeed Mariana's fashion inspiration is Alexa Chung, a British model and TV presenter who is famous for her unique sense of style and details. The role of Europe in changing fashion in Bolivia is very evident. The latest example was Bolivia Moda, a solo fashion week that took place in Santa Cruz. Organized by fashion photographer Pablo Manzoni, the last edition in May welcomed famous Bolivian designers, such as Liliana Castellanos, and growing independent designers, one of which was Mariana. The show was highly attended and is becoming an important social event in Bolivia.

It has been ten years now since Luis Arce began to design clothes. His brand, PVA, is part of the 826 CFshLP house, a multibrand shop at the heart of La Paz, just behind the San Francisco church. CFshLP means Casual Fashion La Paz and the idea is to promote small Bolivian designers to provide clients with a full range of clothes and accessories. It is like a concept store where you can find different brands. They tend to have a real identity and a story behind them. Luis first started by creating clothes for music bands and then expanded development to the public. Luis explained that a lot of enterprises

here had to close because they expected too much of the market and thought an open market like in the US would bring more opportunities. The reality is very different. Working with Christian Lara, from LK- 100% Alpaca, Luis tries to offer the best of Bolivian textile resources but it is not so easy when manufacturing in China is cheaper and often faster. "We are both young, so we have a lot of ideas and we don't want to make formal designs", said Christian. However, they did not rely on any help from the government. Instead they are working with other designers because it is difficult to provide a full collection with different pieces and accessories when the market is so unstable. When one designer takes the risk to be competitive, they have to drop prices, which is not possible now if one or the other was working on his own. That is why 826 CFshLP is at the heart of the image behind the various designer clothing that is on the racks: multicultural and urban.

826 CFshLP is a nineteenth century house that has a particular spirit, just like the brands it hosts. "It has catacombs and a convent, this house has so much potential that I want to exploit", Luis told me. In fact, the place is becoming increasingly well-known among tourists and both Christian and Luis want to make it a must-see among other tourist attractions. Their dream is to expand to other cities in neighbouring countries, such as Lima in Peru, because "the house has such a strong identity that we believe it touches the clients."

Despite some drawbacks, many designers have found it possible to run a fashion business in Bolivia. And the future looks promising: the country is still in the process of improving its market, giving designers more opportunities to reach their clients and to provide an original and personal service. The proximity with a target audience makes fashion in Bolivia more compelling, and Bolivia is not left on the roadside in the race for creative originality. I was surprised and amazed by the motivation shown by designers, and by their belief in their country, a place with so much potential.

THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT COCA

The coca leaf, discovered for both pride and controversy

Eduardo Lopez Zavala, the director of the movie *Inal Mama* (see BX Issue 6) understands it as a symbol of Bolivia. But coca is also part of a world market that has transformed the traditional use of the coca leaf into a sparkling drug experience that attracts ever-growing numbers, especially of young people. However, there is more than cocaine to the coca leaf: the consumption of coca tea is an ancient and harmless practice, and while nowadays it is drugs that make the press, in fact the market for the coca leaf in Bolivia is expanding to alternative uses, principally in pharmacology and cosmetics.

In the early 1900s, the United States, first users in the world, decided to eradicate coca production. This was followed by a series of international conferences aimed at prohibiting the coca culture. In 1951, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified coca amongst the most highly addictive products, and ten years later, an international convention definitely prohibited its production. Though Bolivia and Peru benefited from a 25-year-old respite, coca production has tripled since. The heritage left by this situation is a prolific narco-trafficking trade that crosses over the Bolivian frontiers to please an ever-growing European and American

clientele, while cutting its prices.

Evo Morales announced in 2006 that he would seek scientific proof of the necessity of legal coca plants for the economical well-being of the country, and since then some steps have been taken to control the illegal trade. Back in 2009, the federal police of Bolivia (led by Bolivia's National Planning Director General Wilge Obleas Espinoza) and Brazil decided to work together against crime involving drug trafficking. This action was followed the same year by a meeting between Evo Morales and the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris where they discussed the sale of civilian and military helicopters, respectively named Super Puma and Cougar, to help the fight against drug smugglers. The meeting spoke volumes among the international community and a few months later, Bolivian counter-narcotics forces, known as the FELCN, made their biggest drug bust in ten years. The anti-drug police dismantled a cocaine processing property in Santa Cruz province: a house that was being used as a drug factory.

Psychiatrist Mabel Romero Maury, who has worked with doctors treating drug addicts, informed me that the government was indeed focused on fighting narco-

trafficking but that not enough effort was made to educate people in Bolivia to prevent addiction. Nevertheless, the work of Dr Jorge Hurtado, a coca specialist and founder of the coca museum in La Paz, to create a coca paste, has helped some patients to recover from extreme addictive behaviour. When the government asked for the help of several doctors and coca specialists to discuss the future of the coca leaf, it appeared, said Dra Mabel Romero Maury, that they had a lot of information available. Unfortunately there was less flexibility to apply these ideas in the country.

Although Bolivia took effective action against the illicit cocaine trade and did adhere to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the government is engaged in talks with the US on Law 1008 (the ban of coca production), and is not quite ready yet to kill the "goose that lays the golden eggs", to quote a famous Aesop's fable.

Meanwhile coca's essential and diverse potential is beginning to become evident through its uses in the alternative market. Many Bolivians are reviving coca's original uses: for cooking, folk medicine (the unadulterated coca is well-known to be a mild stimulant

IDN'T KNOW COCA

3000 years ago by the Incas, is still cause
ersy

TEXT: MAEVA GONZALEZ

which counteracts the effects of altitude sickness) and Andean religious rites.

The coca leaf is a major part of several aspects of Bolivian society: social, political, chemical, legal and criminal among others. Dr Jorge Hurtado explained that coca has properties similar to anaesthetics and is often criticized for wrong reasons. According to him, while the coca leaf has been classified as dangerous and unhealthy, there are no doctors or medical studies that have proved this assertion. One of the most striking examples he gave during our meeting was that forty years ago, when the government tried to stop coca consumption, it appeared that work in mines was decreasing. The explanation is that miners need coca to work, as it helps the body and the mind to stay alert. To refuse them their usual coca chewing meant they had no energy for this hard work. Consequently mines' production dropped. The reintroduction of the coca leaf into the miners' daily work maintained the production at a high level without making the miners coca leaf addicts.

In fact "the coca leaf has more vitamins than quinoa, for example, and around 25% more calcium than milk", added

Hurtado. The leaf is a common food supplement as are vitamins pills in Europe. – there is no proof that chewing coca leaf and Bolivia has more alcoholics than cocaine addicts - a relative comparison between leaf and drug might be the relationship of grapes to wine. The coca leaf may contain the essential ingredient for cocaine production, but it does not become harmful until it is transformed by man.

In 1949 procaine was discovered, a similar substance to cocaine, this chemical was found to have an effect akin to the "Fountain of Youth". After administering procaine to patients, especially older ones, researchers noted amelioration in muscles and motion. Ana Aslan played a role in the initial discovery of the anti-aging property of procaine. Coca was then used in various ways to enhance people's physical capabilities. Unlike morphine it does not cause any kind of addiction.

Of course, the coca leaf also relieves stomach pain. In Europe I have been used to drinking coffee after eating, which is in fact the worst thing we could do to our digestion. Coffee opens a so-called "sphincter" in the stomach, which regulates the passages between the top and the bottom of the digestive sys-

tem. Coca, on the other hand, is beneficial to the digestion process. "I could give you more and more uses for coca leaf but this is endless and still very controversial even if studies proved us right", finished Dr Hurtado.

In cosmetics, various brands have introduced coca to shampoos, body lotions or hair conditioners. Tourists will probably still be checked at the airport if they try to bring one home. This happened to Bryce, 22, a NGO worker in La Paz: "My friend forgot she had coca shampoo in her bag and as she went through security the dogs began to look nervous. Fortunately we didn't get into trouble but I wouldn't recommend the experience." Coca also appears in some toothpaste, as it prevents some gum diseases.

As my research through the history of coca comes to an end, I feel I have discovered that the coca leaf is far more than just a tradition here in Bolivia. It is a growing market linked to different aspects of the Bolivian economy: the people, the laboratories, the cosmetics, the medicine and more. Despite crackdowns on illegal parts of this sector in the past, the coca industry in Bolivia is still very much alive and given a few years, ready to expand.

PACEÑA

THE PEOPLE'S BEER

Text and Illustration: Robbie Macdonald



Paceña is the top brand in Bolivia. The red, white and gold logo can be seen nearly everywhere you look. In addition to the everyday press, an enthusiastic marketing team oversees that Paceña's image is kept fresh with participation in music festivals, sporting events and trendy night culture. With the supremacy that this beer holds over the market in Bolivia, it is no wonder that it is one of the biggest employers and exporters in the country.

The people responsible for this great success is Cervecería Boliviana Nacional (or CBN). And Paceña is not the only string to their bow. They are the producers of Huari, Bock, Taquiña, Ducal, Astra, Maltín, Margaret and Imperial Beer. With such a vast collection it is no wonder they

hold ninety percent of the market on home ground.

The brewery lies to the north west of the city, near the old train station. It would have been a welcome sight to the foreigners and locals alike as they entered the city back when the brewery was opened in 1886. Nowadays the station might be abandoned but the brewery has expanded extensively. CBN has plants all over the country, and the central brewery itself has undergone a great deal of modernization and now the cutting edge facility towers over the highway heading up to El Alto.

The place is a hive of activity, not only with the trucks bringing in cereals and hops from the various harvests all over the country, but with builders buzzing away with construction and

refurbishment. The modernization is ongoing, and the constant changes showed this is a company that takes growth and improvement very seriously.

The name 'Paceña' comes from the adjective to describe a resident of La Paz. From its beginnings the Paceña brand had close ties with the city, leading consumers of the beer to be called Paceños, and from this the name 'Paceña' was born.

Paceña's method of brewery is of course a closely guarded secret, but it follows the same basic routine of every lager. Cereals and hops are mixed with water and boiled to produce a malty flavour. After being centrifuged to separate the solids yeast is added to begin the ferment-

tation process, and lastly a stringent filtering process begins to ensure the beer has its crystal clarity, gentle carbonation and perfect flavour.

This year CBN celebrates its 125th anniversary. Things were very different back in the fledgling years; Paceña would have been bottled by hand and distributed by mule-driven carts about the city. Supposedly these mules were specially trained to stop at each shop allowing the beer to be unloaded quickly and efficiently. Things have certainly moved on since. The packaging facility is state of the art and bottles the product at a staggering pace. Recycled bottles are brought in and removed – with one slick maneuver the machine manages to empty and discard plastic creates in two seconds. Next the bottles are cleaned with what looks like one of the most complicated dishwasher- slash -conveyor belts ever designed. If any problem with the bottle is discovered by the high speed scanner it is immediately discarded. With each bottle checked it can then be filled. This is possibly the

most impressive part of the process, as 40,000 litres of fresh beer is sealed into the bottles every minute!

Paceña's pedigree is not without recognition. Over the years they have secured many awards for their efforts. To date they have over 50, nationally and internationally. The one they are most proud of is the World Selection Maya Award for best Bolivian product, won with Paceña, and later again by one of their other beers, Margaret.

The laboratories of the facility check that the quality of everything always hits perfection. The attention to detail is impressive. Every ingredient of the beer must be tested individually. Some of the tests seem almost eccentrically precise, including one test that measured the frothiness of the head! The reason is for all this is consistency. CBN refuse to let a single beer out of the facility that could be under par in any way. Incredibly, one bottle sat on the shelf having been recalled because the label had peeled off by about 2 or 3 millimeters

in one corner. Attention to detail is a theme that repeats itself throughout the facility.

The resulting quality and recognition of awards have lead to CBN becoming a truly international exporter. Such destinations of their products include Switzerland, Italy, China, Australia, Spain, England, United States, Peru, Chile and Argentina. Nationally and internationally the marketing for each product is carefully considered so each beer reaches a range of different buyers and consumers.

The last part of the production line comes just before the beer is shipped off; the tasting. Usually this is done by various members of the company on a sort of rotation process, but today the honour was given to your correspondent. Maybe it was the icy cold freshness of the newly tapped nectar, or perhaps it was the attention to detail that had some psychosomatic impact, either way, with that first taste all the precision, the vast market share and the numerous awards made perfect sense.

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Cultural Calendar

Cultural Calendar August 2011

TEATRO MUNICIPAL "ALBERTO SAAVEDRA PÉREZ" Jenaro Sanjinés corner w Indaburo

Friday 19 – 19:30 Piano Concert

A concert by the Bolivian pianist Walter Aparicio Aguirre, currently resident in New York. Aparicio holds a Bachelors degree in Piano Performance from New York University and completed his Masters at the Manhattan School of Music.

Saturday 20 - hrs. 19:30 Kevin Johansen

Ensamble de Altura is preparing a new musical show of international ilk: the renowned Argentinean musician Kevin Johansen is coming to La Paz. He has received many Latino Grammy nominations for his performances of alternative music.

Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 - hrs. 19:30 In time with the Morenada

The group Hiru Hicho, directed by Roger Soria Tapia, takes the stage to perform some of his well-known morenadas in a series of concerts by the name of "Bolivia is my heart."

Wednesday 24 - hrs. 19:30 Rolando Encinas' quena

"Feeling and landscapes in the musical spirit of the quena" is the title of Rolando Encinas' concert, a maestro of the quena. He will be accompanied by additional guest musicians.

Monday 29 - hrs. 19:30 Anniversary of the Conservatory

This tribute concert celebrates the National Conservatory of Music's 104th birthday, and will include the participation of teachers and students at the institution.

Tuesday 30 y Wednesday 31 - hrs. 19:30 Folk Music

Sajama Fusion is reaching its tenth anniversary as a folk group. To commemorate this occasion they have prepared a new show under the direction of Franklin Montecinos.

TEATRO MODESTA SANJINÉS Casa de la Cultura Franz Tamayo – Mcal Santa Cruz corner w Polosí

Saturday 13 y Sunday 14- hrs. 19:30 The Expression of Dance

The Ballet New Hope will show a complete repertoire of dances from the country, as part of the exhibition, 'From Bolivia for Latin America.'

Tuesday 23 - hrs. 08:00 to 14:00 Videos for thought

The Institute of Investigations and Seminars of Law from the UMSA has organized the screening of work from the Sociojudicial film contest. The screening intends to bring awareness to social and judicial issues, in the hope of preventing future crime.

CINE TEATRO MUNICIPAL "6 DE AGOSTO". Av. 6 de Agosto almost on the corner of Rosendo Gutiérrez

Afternoon: 19:30

"¿Quién mató a La Llamita Blanca?" (Who killed the little white llama?) directed by Rodrigo Bellot.

Evening: 19:30

"Sena Quina" directed by Paolo Agazzi.

Sunday 14 – hrs. 10:00

Screening in the Feria Dominical of El Prado.

Afternoon: 16:30

"Los Andes no creen en Dios" (The Andes don't believe in God) directed by Antonio Eguino.

Evening: 21:30

"El ascensor" (The Lift) directed by Tomás Bascope.

From Tuesday 16 to Sunday 28

Late Afternoon: 19:30, Evening: 21:00

Screening of the Peruvian Film 'Contracorriente', Directed by Javier Fuentes-Leon.

Sunday 28 – hrs. 10:00

Screening in the Feria Dominical of El Prado.

MUSEOS MUNICIPALES

Tuesday to Friday: 9:30 to 12:30 – 15:00 to 19:00, Saturday and Sunday: 9:00 to 13:00.

Museo Costumbrista Juan de Vargas (Calle Sucre corner w Jaén)

From Thursday 4 to Friday 26

Chamber of Temporary Exhibitions

"Creativity in Art", exhibition of paintings by the artist Alberto Medina. The maestro Medina, recent winner of the "Premio Obra de Vida" from the Salón Pedro Domingo Murillo, will display his creative versatility through his oil paintings, watercolours and mixed techniques presented in various mediums.

Museo Tambo Quirquincho Until 31 August.

Exhibition of winning pieces from the LIX celebration of the Salón Municipal de Artes Plásticas, "Pedro Domingo Murillo".

LIVING THE DEATH ROAD

At the end of the Death Road
awaits....La Senda Verde

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES

PART 3

After your white-knuckled ride down The World's Most Dangerous Road you are welcomed into a slice of heaven, a place otherwise known as La Senda Verde. Entering the property through the lush overgrown canopy and crossing the clear waters of their large river, you already get a sense that you are in for a real treat. Once inside the magic really starts to happen. La Senda Verde is home to more than 250 rescued wild animals. A

diverse family of furry friends including Spider Monkeys, Capuchin Monkeys and Squirrel Monkeys to Macaws, Toucans and the Andean Bear, just to name a few. Each of these animals has arrived with its own story and in need of a little help to be rehabilitated. The team at La Senda Verde provide the best care possible in a natural and nurturing environment, and there are always many hands at help with the onsite volunteer

program.

Eco-friendly cabañas and huts are available to complete your experience to commune with nature. Staying a night in the tree house is always a favorite to gain a bird's eye view of the property and enjoy the playful monkey visits. La Senda Verde is dedicated to developing sustainable eco-tourism, educating and inspiring others to have a new appreciation for the wilderness and wild animals.

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"I OWN YOU"
by Michael Durn

The Bolivian Express is currently looking for an Editor (ideal commitment of 3+ months). Native proficiency in English and excellent writing skills are a must. Experience in content production management (journalistic or travel writing) is desirable. Good local knowledge and design skills are a plus. Write to info@bolivianexpress.org for more information

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